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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## THE GOBELIN TAPESTRY PRESENTED TO THE FRENCH BENEVOLENT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK.

BY W. R. BRADSHAW.



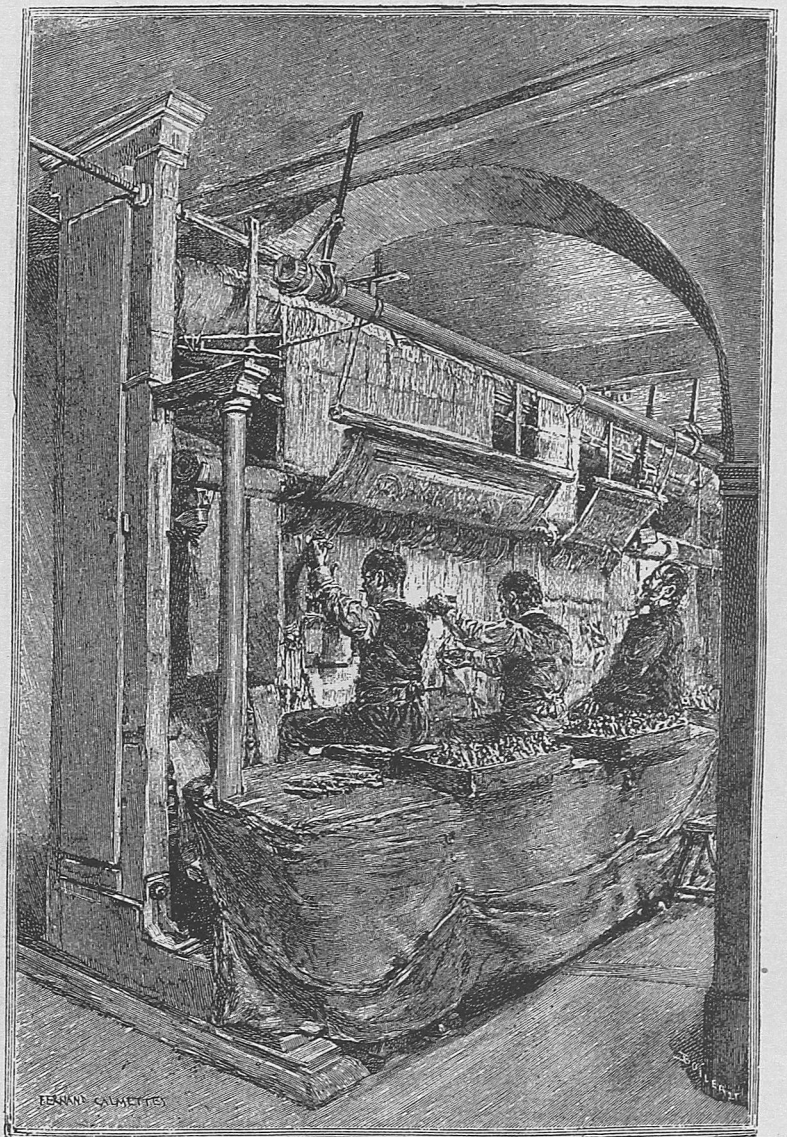
THE French Government has just bestowed on the French Benevolent Society, of this city, for its hospital, a gift the like of which has never before been conferred except upon a Sovereign Prince, viz., a tapestry seventeen feet in height by twenty-three in width, reproducing the famous picture by Gros of "Les Pestiférés de Jaffa," which comes from the National Manufactory of Les Gobelins. This is an honor conferred upon the city of New York

as well as the Société Française de Bienfaisance. The artistic ability and vast expenditure of time and patience involved in producing a Gobelin tapestry, added to the fact that such fabrics have never been sold, and only conferred as presents upon the rulers of states for state reasons, have given an enormous prestige and value to such fabrics. A discussion lately took place as to whether any genuine Gobelins were in America or not, the weight of evidence being in favor of the fact that certain individuals in this country and Canada possess several good examples of these famous tapestries. It appears that two Gobelins, which decorated part of the furniture of the de Lotbinière manor at Vaudreuil, Canada, are now in the possession of a Canadian named Alain C. McDonald. They were originally acquired by the Marquis de Lotbinière from the Marquis de Vaudrieul, the last French Governor of Canada. These two Gobelins, which are not above three yards in length, are valued at fifty thousand dollars. It appears also that several wealthy Americans are in possession of genuine Gobelins, imported by an art furniture house in New York, purchased, doubtless, from Gobelin weavers who were permitted to work out of hours for their personal account. Such work is usually restricted in size as the workmen do not live in quarters that would permit them to execute large pieces. Their yarns not being dyed in the manufactory, nor prepared for use under supervision of its trained inspectors and artists, this outside work is not ranked by connoisseurs as being very much better than that of any well regulated manufactory of modern tapestries. There are, nevertheless, in this country some undoubted antique Gobelin tapestries, whose owner possesses attested copies of the letters which accompanied the presentation of such tapestries to one of the oldest and grandest of the princely houses in Europe. With regard to all the pieces of tapestry heretofore in possession of Americans, it must be observed that the fabrics themselves are very small, or fragmentary, in size, and have only reached their present owners through a variety of channels, more or less remote from the National Manufactory, or its exclusive patron, the French Government. Now, however, a magnificent Gobelin tapestry, representing a famous scene in the life of Napoleon the First, of enormous dimensions, is received at first hand by an American Institution, direct from the French Government. By reason of these high claims the tapestry in possession of the Société Française Bienfaisance, of New York, is the most magnificent as well as the most valuable Gobelin in the Western Continent.

As few people are acquainted with the origin and history of the celebrated institution producing these tapestries, we give the following *resumé* of its history: The name of Gobelins comes to it from Gilles Gobelin, a famous dyer from Rheims, in the time of Francis the First. This Gobelin is said to have discovered the secret of producing that fine scarlet color known as turkey red. The Gobelin brothers having acquired land on the banks of a small stream, La Bièvre, erected thereon their dyeing establishment, using the waters of this stream, which proved particularly favorable for dyeing purposes. Thus it was that this spot in Paris, located in the Faubourg St. Marceau, received the name of Gobelins, which it has retained ever since. About 1650 the Gobelins family retired from business and sold their large factory, which passed into the hands of the brothers Cannaye, who, to the dye works, added a department for the weaving of tapestries and carpets for the people. It was under the management of Les Frères Cannayes that Glück, a Hollander, and Jans Janssen, a master weaver from Bruges, in Flanders, began to work tapestries at the Gobelins. The high reputation which attached itself to the artistic production of these two master craftsmen attracted the attention of Colbert, minister of Louis XIV. Acting on his advice the King purchased the

Gobelins, and in 1662 established a manufactory for the production of art tapestries. It was then known as "Hotel Royal des Gobelins," a name which was soon given up for the title of "Manufacture Royale des Tapisseries et Meubles de la Couronne." Colbert established a school of art and industry at the manufactory, Jans, the master weaver from Bruges was appointed, with two associates, head of the vertical or high warp loom (*la haute lisse*), and Kerckove, also from Flanders, had charge of the dyeing establishment. Sixty apprentices and students lived there at the expense of the public treasury, being taught the art. At first the sons of master weavers were the only ones privileged to learn the art. The apprentices were taught to manufacture tapestry, beginning with the horizontal loom (*la basse lisse*) in which the warp is horizontally placed. After they have proved sufficiently proficient on the horizontal loom, they are advanced to the vertical loom (*la haute lisse*).

The production of a Gobelin tapestry is slow and costly. The worker is obliged to use one of his hands to pass the shuttle between the threads of the warp whilst he makes room for it

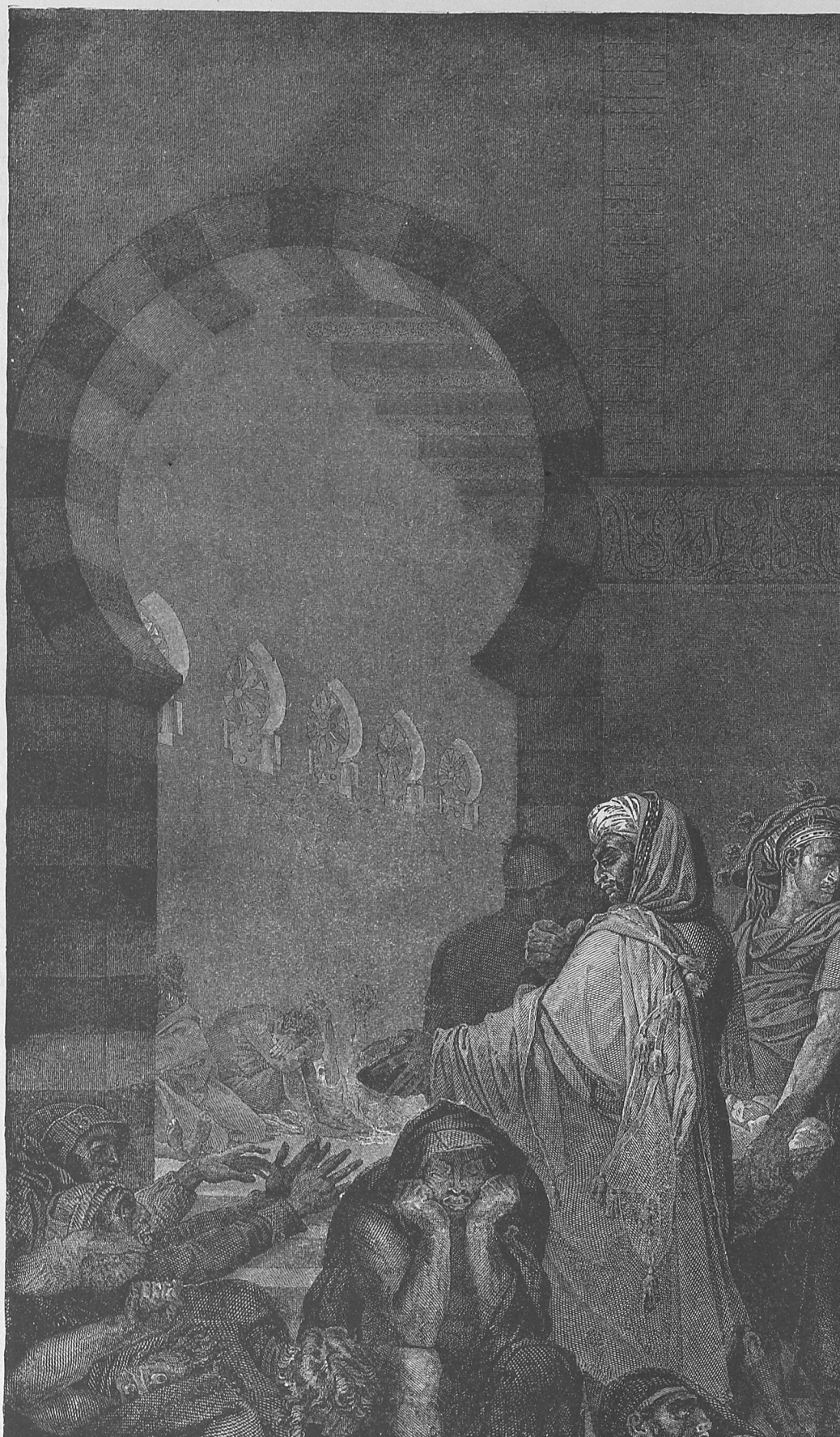


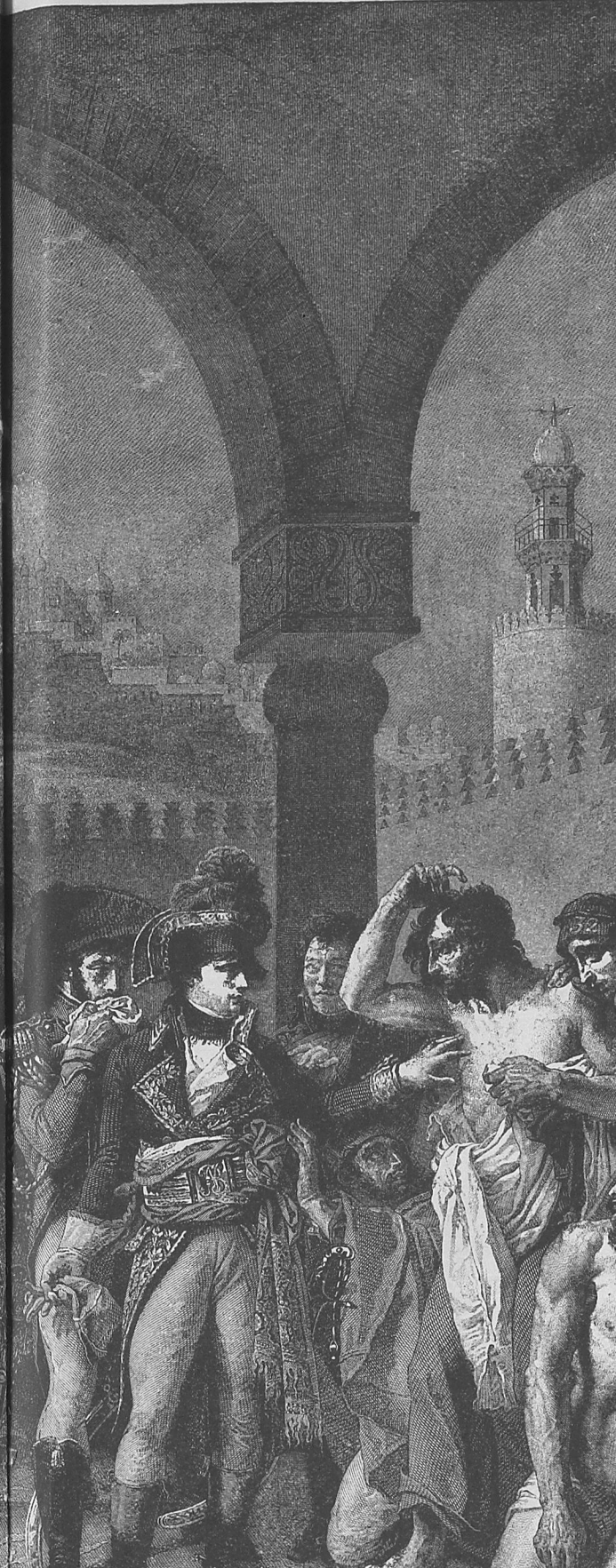
WEAVING TAPESTRIES AT THE GOBELINS—THE HIGH WARP LOOM.

with the other. He is absolutely without mechanical help, and the only woof is the passage by hand of the variously colored threads through the warp.

Tapestry is a mosaic in wool. On a series of parallel threads forming the warp, the artist weaver first traces the principal lines of the picture which he is to reproduce. He then partially weaves every single element of color composing the subject. According to the requirements of the design he places the shuttle through one, two or more threads of the warp, and as after each operation he must secure the threads of the woof by a hidden knot, he is obliged to weave the wrong side towards him. The outlines of the drawings to be reproduced, and the greater or less extent of the half-tints, indicate the length of the courses, as well as the number of them to be arranged one above the other. The workman passes from one color to another by shades, which partake of both, and which are graduated

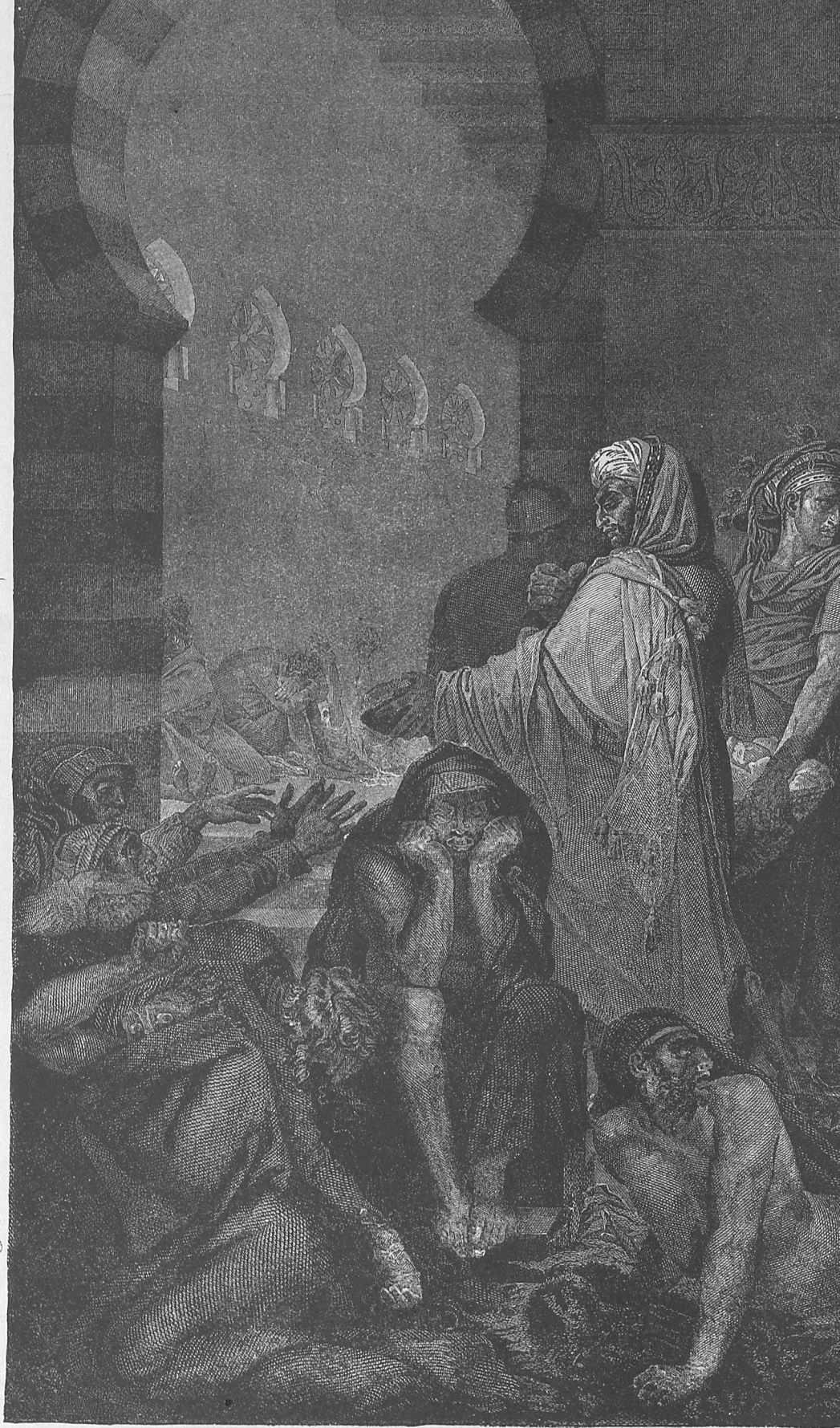
















RY PRESENTED BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT TO THE FRENCH HOSPITAL OF NEW YORK. SUBJECT: LES PESTIF





## THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

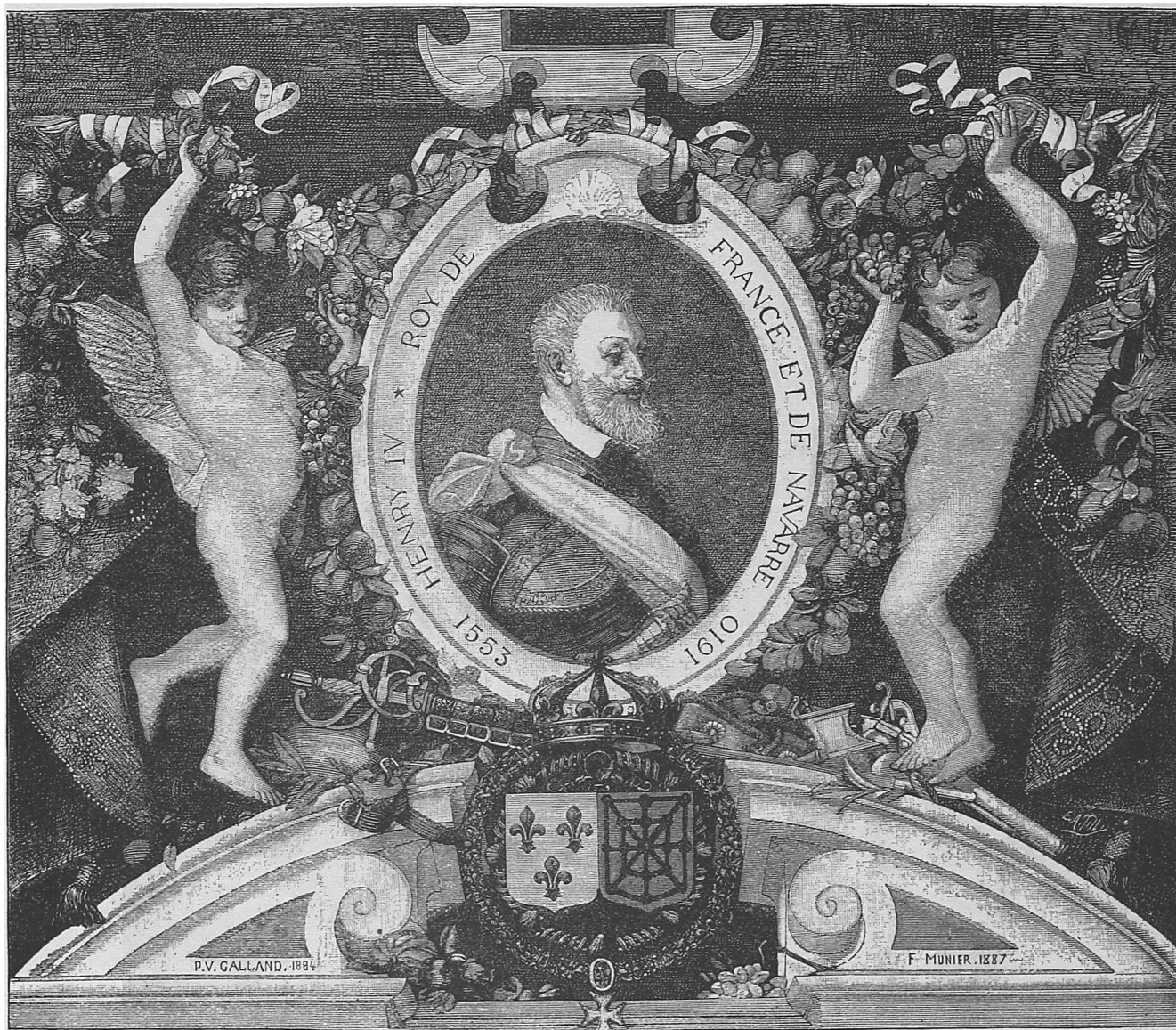
like hatching. The right treatment of these stipples forms one of the greatest difficulties of the work, and the practised eye of the workman can alone determine where to begin or finish a shade. There is thus brought to bear upon the production of a Gobelin tapestry, first, the long and self-sacrificing apprenticeship of the weaver, who is an artist, using dyed threads instead of pigments for his picture. The next accessory is the genius of the painter, who usually selects some great historical scene for his subject. This being completed, then follow the long years of labor, during which time the weaver patiently toils on, constructing his splendid fabric thread by thread, whose colors have been prepared and dyed by the greatest chemists and dyers of the age. A tapestry usually requires from ten to fifteen years before it is thought perfect by the judges, and the weaver that lives to look upon his third achievement is spoken of as having a life beside which art itself is short. Next to picking out the threads of silk or wool that contains the various tints of the picture to be reproduced, is the difficulty of performing the work on the reverse side to that on which the weaver has out-

their charm of style and decorative harmony which awaken not only the astonishment of the public, but the admiration of people of taste, all of which qualities are observable in the Gros picture.

It required twelve years to complete the tapestry to which we now refer, known as "Les Pestiférés de Jaffa, et le Général Buonaparte."

Glück had several high warp looms constructed, and at these sat men who had gone through fifteen years of hard apprenticeship in Flanders to become proficient weavers. In 1667 Colbert resigned the general direction of the work in favor of Charles Lebrun, the famous painter. In 1690 Mignard succeeded Lebrun. From 1695 to the middle of the reign of Louis XV the Gobelins fell into a period of neglect, but under the influence of Madame de Pompadour artistic life received a new impulse.

About 1736, all the low warp looms, which, since the introduction by Glück of the upright loom, had been used only in the manufacture of carpets and upholstery, were sent to Beauvais, Fontainebleau, Aubusson and Felletin in France.



A GOBELIN TAPESTRY AT THE LATE PARIS EXPOSITION.

lined the figure, the subject itself being behind him. In the outline of his figures, and in passing from one shade to another, the workman is guided by a slight tracing in the warp, which is done by means of a transparent paper, on which a sketch of the picture is countertraced; but this precaution would be of little use if the workmen were not specially educated so as to be able to supply the insufficiency of the outline by his own intelligence, and by the resources of his art. The result of this patient application of the technique of science, is to rival the efforts of the painter. Admirers of such works before discovering that they are tapestry, invariably use the same expression—"Is it possible that this is not a painting?" It is a great merit to produce such force of effect in deceiving the eye. The perfection of the weaver's craft astonishes us by its resemblance to that of the painter. These truly beautiful works charm us by their superior execution, by the sentiment of their composition,

Many improvements were introduced from 1747 onwards, and in 1759, Vaucanson, so well known for his great genius in mechanics, invented new modifications for the process used at that time.

Among the works that were produced at the Gobelins, under the masterly directions of Charles Coypel, were "Louis XV at The Chase," (after Oudry), "Endymion" and "The Swing," (after Boucher), and "The Adventures of Don Quixote," after Coypel's own painting.

During the first year of the Revolution the Gobelins suffered for a while, but under the First Empire they were reorganized, new methods applied, looms perfected, and new models made. The great military deeds of this epoch were reproduced after the great pictures of the great masters of the time; Girardet, Gérard, Vernet, etc., and their high supervision, the artist workers at the Gobelins vied with one another to reach the

highest conception of the weaver's art, and the study of drawing and of the living model brought their efficiency to the highest point.

In 1814, a new splendor was given to this institution, by the reproduction of Ruben's masterpieces. In 1826, the Gobelins was united with la Savonnerie, at Chaillot.

Each succeeding government encouraged this art, by ordering reproductions of the most famous paintings of the Flemish and Italian masters. To-day the Gobelins stand at the highest pitch of artistic workmanship in this wonderful industry.

On the second day of May, 1871, Napias Piquet, *un Petroleur*, attempted to destroy the royal tapestries in the Louvre. He had no sooner entered the building however, than he was bound and gagged, and flung upon a heap of rubbish. Fortunately the tapestries had been rolled on cylinders, and sent to the arsenal at Brest. Les Gobelins, however, were not to escape the flames of the Commune, for several tapestries were consumed in the Tuileries, while in the manufactory itself, 250 pieces were destroyed, ranging from the time of Louis the XIV.

It has always been regarded as a great honor, and a token of uncommon favor, when the masterpiece of the Gobelins is sent as a national gift, to grace the walls of the palace of a sovereign. The famous masterpiece, after the noble conception of Gros is certainly a gift of inestimable value given in consideration of the great humanitarian work established in New York, for the relief of the poor among the French population, to which work Mr. Joseph Thoron, a New York merchant, devotes himself with so much earnestness and self sacrifice. It is a great encouragement to Mr. Thoron and his associates, in their noble undertaking to see the institution created and erected by them, receive such recognition from the government of the French Republic. In our illustration of the subject of the tapestry, it will be seen that the theme of the artist harmonizes exactly with the purposes of the institution, to which the tapestry has been presented. The French government has, with great judgment, selected the pictorial subject, not a representation of the greatest figure in the history of France leading his legions to victory, nor when seated on the throne of Empire. The subject is nobler still, for it represents Napoleon, throwing aside the unworthy fears of his associates for his safety, in the act of placing his hands upon the plague-smitten people of Jaffa. This is the noblest episode in the history of Napoleon, for it represents him as sympathizing with sick and dying humanity. To obtain such a gift as this, is a success for which those who conceived the idea of soliciting it, may rightfully be proud. It is a special honor for the French colony, and for their hospital, that the mother country should have so gracefully acceded to the request of the Viscount Paul d'Abzac, Consul General of France and it speaks volumes in testimony of the high esteem in which he is held by his government. At his solicitation, for the first time, an exception is made to an absolute rule; that no piece of art from the Gobelins can ever be disposed of, unless as a gift to a crowned head, or the chief of a sovereign state.

Of the picture of Gros, Théophile Gauthier says: "Gros, who was a pupil of David, though imbued with the worship of antiquity, was above all a "Modern." He could grasp contemporaneous life, and he had the gift of idealizing the "true" and of making the "realistic" grandiose. He possessed the feeling of color, life and movement to the extreme. His genius was fervent, tumultuous, boundless, and he looked upon these gifts as defects. In his immense picture "Les Pestiférés de Jaffa," this great artist did not hesitate to touch the painful, this horror of ancient art. A strange subject, indeed, in this century of selected history, the one of a hospital filled up with the sick, the dying and the dead: Gros has solved the problem triumphantly. Yielding to the inspiration of his genius, the artist eliminates the walls of the room where the historical fact took place. He shows in the background, through Moorish arcades, the oriental outline of the City of Jaffa. Thus enlarged, the scene allows the painter to present feelingly to the eye, the moral grandeur of the subject. Towards the centre of the picture stands the general in chief, Buonaparte, full of that assurance of the hero, confiding in his star, having his finger upon the contagious boil, on the breast of a half naked sailor stricken with the fatal disease, and who had raised himself to welcome his general. Berthier, Bessieres, Daure, and the chief physician, Desgenettes, follow Buonaparte, full of anxiety at his sublime foolhardiness. An officer suffering from ophthalmia, and with eyes under a bandage creeps towards the centre of light. At the corner of the picture, soldiers stricken with the plague, are cared for by Turks; and Mosellet, the young French surgeon, who fell victim to his devotion, helps a sick man on his knees. Dead bodies are lying on the ground, and some convalescents accept the bread that some Arabs present them. The tragic horror is there undiminished, but there is great beauty in this promiscuous conglomeration of the dead and dying. The artist does not avoid homeli-

ness, nor does he seek for it, but he idealizes it in the most touching and dramatic sense."

When "Les Pestiférés de Jaffa" was exhibited, the effect produced on the public was immense. The frame of the enormous canvas was covered with palms and wreaths.

The place for such a work of art is plainly at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Its possession would be unique, for no other museum in the country can expect to possess a rival to such a tapestry.

## A BOUDOIR IN THE RENAISSANCE STYLE.

THE very handsome boudoir represented on page 22 is designed by Mr. F. R. Eisner, of Nuremburg, Cabinet Maker to the King of Bavaria. The view here represented is that of an apartment which is otherwise occupied as a lady's bedchamber, but which is separated therefrom by an elegant railing of wrought iron in the Renaissance style. It is decorated in black and gold bronze. The walls of the apartment are beautifully varied with panels and pilasters, which latter support a magnifrieze. The pilasters are decorated in imitation of marble. The wall panels are hung with red silk in imitation of Gobelin tapestry. The frieze is composed of a heavily embossed pressed paper, also in the Renaissance style, richly decorated with lacquers and bronzes, the ground being in gold lacquer. The apartment is lit by a lantern or skylight, filled with gold colored glass which fills the apartment with a soft, mellow light. In the background, a doorway opens into a conservatory. To the left of the door stands a writing desk with shelves for books in dark mahogany. The design is very artistic, either side of the bookcase being supported by caryatides, modeled by the artistic Rosany. The crest of the bookcase has the bust of a charming coquette. In front of the wall on your right, stands a low, luxurious couch, with a richly carved walnut frame. It is upholstered in pale rose satin, the pillows being embroidered in green and silver. Carved Amorettes with curly heads and chubby limbs, support a coronet above the back of the couch. The back of the couch has a panel of sea-green silk with silver embroidery. Over the couch is a canopy of silk of a pale lilac hue. The canopy is suspended by means of rings and a brass rod, from the heavily moulded mahogany framework. One end of the canopy is upheld by a richly ornamented spear. Beside the couch stands a *tabourette de fantaisie*, or fancy table, on which to place a book or bouquet of flowers. On the table stands a very costly bronze girandole with candles. Looking in the direction of the bed, which is not shown, stands the bust of a smiling Satyr. The ensemble of the boudoir is particularly fine, and the Renaissance style here adopted, is possibly the best of all styles for modern interior decoration. For the past 2,000 years, there has been developed a style of decoration in Europe, which should properly be called the European style. It embraces the various styles known as Grecian, Roman, Etruscan, Pompeian, Italian and German Renaissance, the Pompadour styles of Louis XIV, XV and XVI, and the Empire and Colonial styles. Its chief characteristics are the ever recurring scrolls, together with the reproductions of real or mythological figures, cupids, masques and medallions being abundant. This splendid style of art reached its highest culmination in the style known as Italian Renaissance, and afterward degenerated into the more frivolous styles that ruled in France in the eighteenth century. As an example therefore, of the European style of art, as distinguished from the Moorish, Turkish, Persian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Hindoo and Japanese styles, each of which possess their own beautiful characteristics, we point our readers to the illustration already referred to, as a model for the interior treatment in the highest and best department of the European style.

GILDING in oil is best done on solid and smooth painted ground of a gray tint so hard as to admit of being rubbed down smooth. The oil size is made of Oxford ochre and chrome yellow finely ground in fat oil and tempered with boiled oil so as to dry in twenty four hours, and hold its tack for double that time. It should be used with a sable or camel's hair pencil or brush to leave its surface smooth and glossy. In sizing letters and ornaments their shape is to be made fuller than it is to be finished, so that there may be room to work around the gilt with the groundwork and thus leave the edge smooth. When the size feels tacky it is ready for the gold leaf, which is put on in various ways. Some folding back the paper leaf, run the forefinger nail along its edge and turning it suddenly over against the sized surface, so much of the gold remains and is pressed down evenly with a cotton dab or large dry camel's hair brush, others lift up with the tip having hair edging on one side, pressing it down with a camel's hair or fine hair brush.